



*United States Attorney
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**U.S. UNSEALS INDICTMENT CHARGING TWO MEMBERS OF COLOMBIAN
HEROIN ORGANIZATION AS PART OF 'OPERATION EMERALD EXPRESS'**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that the United States has charged GUILLERMO MAURICIO RESTREPO GARCIA ("RESTREPO") and LEONEL MENDOZA AGUIRRE ("MENDOZA"), a former Columbian National Police Colonel, as members of a heroin trafficking organization based in Colombia.

The charges were the result of "Operation Emerald Express," a joint investigation involving cooperation between the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF"), the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), and Colombian law enforcement.

Eighteen members of the organization, including RESTREPO, were arrested in Colombia today in connection with their alleged membership in the organization. MENDOZA was arrested in Colombia on December 27, 2004. MENDOZA and RESTREPO are being held in Colombia pending submission of formal extradition requests by the

United States.

According to the Indictment unsealed today in Manhattan federal court, from approximately March 2004 to November 2004, RESTREPO and MENDOZA coordinated the recruitment and deployment of drug couriers through an airport in Bogota, Colombia, to smuggle heroin into the United States. Documents submitted by the United States to Colombian authorities indicate that MENDOZA abused his official position within the Columbian National Police to pass drug couriers through the El Dorado airport in Bogota, Colombia.

As set forth in the Indictment, on more than 50 different occasions, law enforcement officers intercepted telephone conversations during which RESTREPO and MENDOZA were discussing the coordination of drug couriers. The United States estimates that MENDOZA and RESTREPO were responsible for sending approximately 20 kilograms of heroin per month through the airport in Bogota, Colombia, and to date the investigation has resulted in the seizure of more than 30 kilograms of heroin, with a wholesale value of approximately \$2 million.

If convicted, RESTREPO and MENDOZA each face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison. The Indictment also seeks forfeiture from MENDOZA and RESTREPO in the amount of \$9,600,000, based on their role in conspiring to distribute and import heroin into the United States over approximately an eight-month period in 2004.

Mr. KELLEY praised the investigative efforts of the DEA, ICE and OCDETF, and also commended Columbian law enforcement for their cooperation. Mr. KELLEY said the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL M. BAROFSKY and DAVID S. LEIBOWITZ are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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